



## **City of Northampton**

# **Stormwater and Flood Control Utility FAQs**

### ***What is stormwater?***

Stormwater is the runoff from rainfall and snowmelt. During major storms an astonishing amount of water must be managed by our infrastructure. Water is collected by street drains and culverts throughout the city, and then redirected into our local brooks and water bodies. Stormwater picks up debris and pollutants along the way. Impervious surfaces, such as rooftops, driveways, and parking lots create the most runoff.

### ***What stormwater infrastructure does the City own and maintain?***

The City owns and maintains almost 5,000 catch basins, 114 miles of storm drain pipe, 326 outfalls, and 190 culverts. Construction of this system began over 100 years ago, and in many areas the pipes are now too small. Some areas of the City have chronic drainage problems and failing infrastructure. The value of the City's existing drainage system is approximately \$200 million.

### ***What Flood Control Facilities were built to protect the City?***

In 1940 the Army Corps of Engineers built our flood control system to protect Northampton from the Connecticut and Mill Rivers. The Connecticut River portion consists of a 1-mile long levee, 3 concrete floodwalls, a powerful pump station and an emergency generator. The Mill River section includes a 2,300 foot levee, a floodwall, the South Street Control Structure and the 2-mile long Mill River diversion channel. In exchange for the Federal government building these structures, the City agreed to assume all maintenance and operation expenses.

### ***Why has the City created a new Utility Fee for Stormwater and Flood Control?***

In the past, the money for maintaining our Flood Control and Stormwater Drainage Systems has come from the General Fund (i.e. from Property Taxes). Over the years, the City has minimized expenses by deferring maintenance and postponing new projects. This has led to an aging system neglected too long. In addition, two things have happened recently that compel the City to begin spending more money:

1. The Army Corps of Engineers has mandated that the City undertake several repair and maintenance projects for our flood control system. They also want us to initiate several engineering studies that have the potential to identify additional needs. Preliminary estimates show that it will require more than \$1 million to meet these immediate requirements.
2. The second part involves the storm drains that run below our streets. The City is awaiting the release of our new Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Stormwater Permit. This permit allows the City to discharge stormwater into streams and brooks around the city. The new permit will require the City to increase our level of maintenance, to upgrade parts of the drainage system, and to begin monitoring stormwater outfalls.



These new requirements necessitate a new source of funding. The City's General Fund simply does not have adequate money to meet our stormwater obligations. In March 2014, the Northampton City Council passed a new ordinance that created a new Stormwater and Flood Control Utility.

### ***What projects will the Stormwater and Flood Control Utility fee fund this year?***

The FY 2015 budget includes the cost of following projects: flood control levee repair, levee certification (engineering analyses), a pump-station upgrade study, River Road Retaining Wall repairs, Eastern Avenue drainage reconstruction, and Hinckley Street drainage reconstruction. In the near future other drainage system upgrades will be needed across the City. Moving forward, the annual revenue requirement for flood control and stormwater drainage, including both operations and capital projects, will be in the range of \$1.5-2.0 million per year.

### ***What is the stormwater and flood control utility billing formula?***

Similar to a water or sewer fee, a stormwater and flood control fee is a fee for service. One advantage of a fee system is that all property owners will participate, *including the non-profit sector and City properties*. All land produces runoff. In particular, impervious areas such as paving and buildings have the most impact on stormwater runoff. The billing formula sets runoff coefficients for impervious surface (0.95) and pervious surface (0.1). A cap of 1 acre was set for billable pervious area.

For a given property, the utility will calculate the amount of impervious and pervious surface. These totals will be multiplied by the runoff coefficients to calculate the property's net hydraulic area. This number is then multiplied by a rate to calculate the annual charge. The billing rate (annual budget) is approved each year by the City Council.

### ***What does this mean for homeowners?***

There are roughly 6,600 smaller residential properties (1-3 family) in Northampton. Under the billing formula these properties are divided into four groups based on the impervious surface area on each property. All properties within each group pay the same fee. This standard fee is calculated based on the average impervious and pervious areas for all properties within each group. Based on the annual budget of \$1,980,056, the annual residential fees are estimated to be:

<b>\$63.94</b>	(impervious area less than 2,250 square feet (sf))
<b>\$91.05</b>	(impervious area 2,250 – 3,056 sf)
<b>\$125.61</b>	(impervious area 3,056 – 4,276 sf)
<b>\$259.07</b>	(impervious area greater than 4,276 sf)

### ***What about costs to businesses, non-profits and other non-residential properties?***

For the approximately 4,460 non-residential and larger residential properties (4 or more units), fees will be calculated individually based on the actual amount of impervious and pervious area for each property.

### ***Is there an opportunity to get a credit on a bill?***

A credit program provides property owners an opportunity to apply for credits. Starting July 1, 2014, credits are available for small residential stormwater improvements (rain gardens and porous driveways), construction and maintenance of larger stormwater best management practices, protected open land, commonly owned undeveloped properties and educational programs. Senior (needs-based), low income, and protected land credits are automatically applied based on documentation by the Northampton Assessor's Office. All other credits require submission of an application and other documentation. Additional information about credits can be found on the website or at the DPW Office.

### ***What is the schedule for implementation?***

The City Council passed the Stormwater & Flood Control Utility Ordinance on March 20, 2014 and a new stormwater and flood control fee is being implemented for Fiscal Year 2015. Quarterly bills will be sent to property owners with their Water and Sewer bills. However, for this first implementation year, first and second quarter bills will be consolidated on the second quarterly bill starting October 1, 2014.

### ***Need more information?***

- Visit the website: <http://ma-northampton.civicplus.com/726/Stormwater-Flood-Control-Utility>
- Detailed questions: call, email, or come in



**City of Northampton  
Department of Public Works  
125 Locust Street  
Northampton, MA 01060**

**James R. Laurila, P.E., City Engineer**  
**Phone: (413) 587-1570**  
**Email: [JLaurila@Northamptonma.gov](mailto:JLaurila@Northamptonma.gov)**